When it comes to Mars, universities mean business

By John Ira Petty

Six teams from universities around the country have been selected to write drafts for the NASA Mars Exploration Business Plan under the 1999 NASA Means Business Student Competition.

The new national pilot program directly involves university students in real NASA programs and missions. The competition is a Human Exploration and Development of Space University Partners (HEDS UP) Program. HEDS UP is sponsored by NASA and is administered by the Lunar and Planetary Institute and Texas Space Grant Consortium.

Among the program's goals are to broaden and strengthen the professional relationships between NASA scientists, engineers, and administrators and counterparts in the academic community and to provide a hands-on educational experience for the students involved. It also seeks to generate fresh views on how to accomplish human exploration and development of space.

The winners were Massachusetts Institute of Technology, Texas A&M University, the University of Maryland, Georgia Tech University, the University of Colorado, and the University of Illinois Champaign/Urbana.

"It was a very close competition," said Humboldt C. Mandell Jr. of the Exploration Office at JSC, who coordinates the center's NASA Means Business effort. "All the proposals submitted displayed strengths."

The student teams selected in the national competition will write sections of the draft of the NASA Mars Exploration Business Plan, part of the strategic roadmap by which people will initially explore and develop Mars.

Each team's proposal will investigate issues important to NASA's Mars Human/Robotic Exploration Team mission planners, and propose solutions. The Mars mission planners will review each team's work with the expectation of incorporating it into the official NASA Mars Exploration Business Plan.

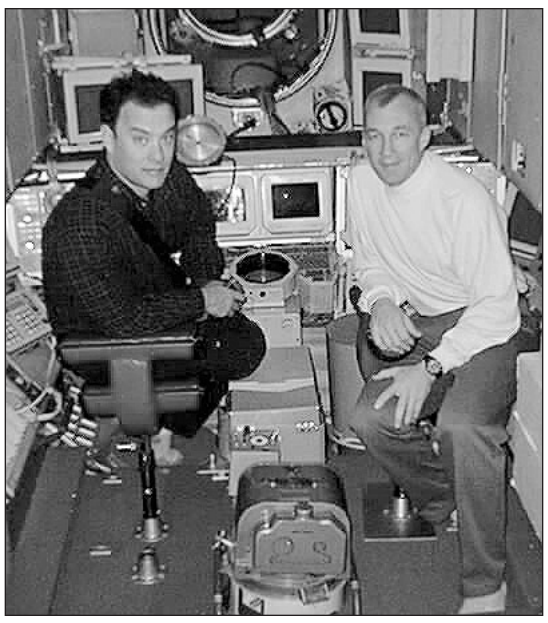
Winning teams receive $1,000 cash awards and travel grants to JSC, where they will present their work at a NASA Customer Engagement Conference May 24 to 26.

Winners were selected on criteria including strength and depth of thought in their proposals, with particular emphasis on recognition of core planning issues facing NASA and its prospective partners; institutional and community resources obtained in support of the team's proposal-writing and post-selection activities, for example course credit, coverage of expenses, local publicity, and community outreach support.

Each of the six student teams will be partnered with key NASA and industry scientists, engineers and administrators who will act as information sources or mentors.

JSC's Steve Nesbitt and Ralph Schomburg were among the evaluators, who also came from NASA Headquarters, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, Ames Research Center and Kennedy Space Center.

For further information, see http://www.tsgc.utexas.edu/nmb. ■



STAR VISITS STAR CITY – Actor Tom Hanks recently toured astronaut and cosmonaut training facilities at the Gagarin Cosmonaut Training Center at Star City, Russia. Astronaut Terry Wilcutt, then NASA's Director of Operations at Star City, here shows the two-time Academy Award winner and star of *Apollo 13* the inside of the Mir Space Station's core module. Hanks, a self-proclaimed space enthusiast, was in Moscow filming for an upcoming movie.

NASA requests submissions for 1999 Software of the Year Award

NASA's Chief Information Officer Lee Holcomb, co-sponsor with NASA's Chief Engineer Daniel Mulville, chair of NASA's Inventions and Contributions Board, is calling for submissions for the 1999 NASA Software of the Year Award to give recognition to software developed and owned by NASA.

Last year, the competition resulted in two first place winners who were each awarded $50,000. Information about the winner and the finalists from 1998 is available at http://www.hq.nasa.gov/office/codei/swy98win.html.

The award, which will include a plaque, a certificate signed by the administrator, and up to $100,000, will be presented to author(s) of software in which (1) NASA has an intellectual property interest, (2) it has been supported, adopted, sponsored, or used by NASA, (3) it is significant to the NASA mission, and (4) software programs must have completed all experimental phases. Additional guidance for the competition is available at the above Web site.

Entries will be judged by the NASA Software Advisory Panel comprised of software development experts from all NASA centers and JPL. After its review, the panel will submit its selection(s) to the ICB. The ICB may recommend a monetary award of up to $100,000 for the winner(s). The award will be presented by NASA officials later in the year on behalf of the NASA administrator.

NASA Form 1329 (ICB Award Evaluation Questionnaire) must be filled out for each entry. Copies of the software, sample applications and data, and descriptive documentation of the package should be included, in addition to evidence demonstrating the impact, ease of use, and degree of innovation and suitability of the entry. This information will be the primary data used by the panel in recommending awards.

Additional inquiries on award criteria should be made through the NASA Space Act Awards liaison officer at any NASA center or through the ICB.

Call (202)358-2468 for names of these contacts. Entries and supporting material must be submitted to these NASA offices not later than April 16, 1999. Each center will then forward to the ICB the center's top selection by May 14, 1999. ■

New royalty formula for civil service inventors in effect

By John Ira Petty

A new and more equitable formula for distribution of royalties to civil service inventors and NASA has gone into effect, Henry L. Davis, director of the Technology Transfer and Commercialization Office, announced.

Under the new formula a single inventor will receive the first $5,000 of royalties, plus 25 percent of royalties over $5,000.

In the case of two to four inventors. Each will receive an equal share of up to $5,000. They also will share 25 percent of remainder up to $25,000. They will share 30 percent of the remainder after the first $25,000.

Five or more inventors will receive an equal share of the first $25,000, and will share 30 percent of the remainder after the first $25,000.

The NASA portion of the royalties are available for technology transfer applications.

Royalties awarded to JSC inventors in for fiscal year 1997 totaled $37,090. In fiscal 1998 awards were $66,614. Tech Brief awards – awards of $150 to each inventor for publication of papers in Tech Briefs Magazine – totaled to $15,300 in fiscal 1997 while $21,600 was awarded in fiscal 1998.

"The trend is positive," Davis said. "But for royalty awards to continue to increase, all inventors, including contractors, should report new technologies to the Technology Transfer and Commercialization Office as soon as possible."

Davis said Ed Fein, JSC patent counsel, is available to answer question. His extension is 34871. ■

Shuttle lands in Idaho

Photo by Stevie Murphy

With Smokey the Bear at the controls, the shuttle glided to a smooth landing in McCall, Idaho, just in time for the McCall Winter Carnival. An astronaut greets the flag-bearing bear. McCall elementary school student Katherine Swick designed the snow sculpture. She and her father, an ice architect and forest ranger with the U.S. Forest Service, made the sculpture. Stevie Murphy, McCall elementary school teacher, took the photo.

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